Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program

FY 2017 Preliminary Proposal (Phase 1) Panel Reviewer Handbook

Contents

Introduction

Thank you for serving as a reviewer for the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS)! We appreciate the tremendous amount of time and effort you commit to the peer review process. By lending your professional expertise, you make a significant contribution to IMLS grant programs and provide an invaluable service to the entire museum, archives, and library communities.

IMLS staff members have prepared this handbook to ensure fair and candid review of all eligible proposals. It provides you with the procedural information you need. Please use it in conjunction with this year's Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program [Notice of Funding Opportunity](#) (NOFO).

Even if you have reviewed for IMLS in the past, you should read through this handbook, since we make changes each year that may impact your reviews.

Purpose and Scope of Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program

The Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program (LB21) supports professional development, graduate education and continuing education to help libraries and archives develop a diverse workforce of librarians to better meet the changing learning and information needs of the American public.

We anticipate two FY17 LB21 funding opportunities, each with two separate deadlines. In addition to the opportunity described in this Notice of Funding Opportunity, a separate LB21 funding opportunity is anticipated to be announced in December 2016 with a preliminary proposal application submission due date in February 2017.

Indicators of Successful Projects

Indicators (characteristics) of successful LB21 projects are as follows:

- **Broad impact:** Proposals should address key needs, high priority gaps, and challenges that face libraries and/or archives. Projects should show the potential for far-reaching impact, influence practice throughout the library and/or archival communities, and build upon current strategic initiatives and agendas in these fields.
- **Advancement of library practice:** Proposals should demonstrate a thorough understanding of current practice and knowledge about the subject matter and show how the project has the potential to strengthen and improve library and/or archival services to benefit the audiences and communities being served.
- **Collaboration:** While partnerships are not required, they can help demonstrate a broad need, field-wide buy-in and input, access to appropriate expertise, sharing of resources, or indicators of sustainability.

IMLS Agency-level Goals

The mission of IMLS is to inspire libraries and museums to advance innovation, lifelong learning, and cultural and civic engagement. We provide leadership through research, policy development, and grant making.

U.S. museums and libraries are at the forefront in the movement to create a nation of learners. As stewards of cultural and natural heritage with rich, authentic content, libraries and museums provide learning experiences for everyone. In FY2017, each award under this program will support one of the following three goals of the IMLS strategic plan for 2012–2016, *Creating a Nation of Learners*:

- IMLS places the learner at the center and supports engaging experiences in libraries and museums that prepare people to be full participants in their local communities and our global society.
- IMLS promotes museums and libraries as strong community anchors that enhance civic engagement, cultural opportunities, and economic vitality.
- IMLS supports exemplary stewardship of museum and library collections and promotes the use of technology to facilitate discovery of knowledge and cultural heritage.

The goals focus on achieving positive public outcomes for communities and individuals; supporting the unique role of museums and libraries in preserving and providing access to collections and content; and promoting library, museum, and information service policies that ensure access to information for all Americans

Funding Categories

The funding categories are:

- Planning Grant
- National Forum Grant
- Project Grant
- Research Grant

Applications must designate one of these funding categories. *Please note*: proposals that address challenges faced by the library and archive fields but do not focus on education and training of librarians should be submitted to the National Leadership Grants for Libraries program.

Planning Grants allow project teams to perform preliminary planning activities, such as analyzing needs and feasibility, solidifying partnerships, developing project work plans, or developing prototypes, or proofs of concept, and pilot studies. Assessing the outcomes of planning activities should be appropriate to this early stage of work. Applications are expected to have a basic framework for planning activities that have the potential to lead to

a future proposal for an LB21 project, such as those described in Project Grants below. Planning Grants are for periods of one year only.

National Forum Grants provide the opportunity to convene qualified groups of experts and key stakeholders, including those from adjacent fields as appropriate, with the purpose of fostering discussion and consideration of nationally important professional development and education-related issues among libraries and archives across the nation. National Forum grant recipients are required to produce reports for wide dissemination with expert opinions for action or research that address key challenges identified in the proposal. Additional mechanisms for widely reaching and building awareness of and interest in the findings by library and archive practitioners are encouraged. The expert opinions resulting from these meetings may be used to inform future applications to the LB21 program. National Forum Grants are for periods of one year only.

Project Grants support projects to develop faculty and library leaders, recruit and educate the next generation of librarians and archivists, conduct research, and assist in the professional development of librarians and archivists. Given the national focus of the program, it is essential that projects have clear potential for national impact and involve partners from multiple parts of the country or a region.

Research Grants involve the investigation of key questions important to the library or information science professions. Basic and applied research projects address an area of interest or concern for libraries and archives; include clearly articulated research questions; may build theory and/or add to existing theory and research already done in the area of interest; feature data collection and analysis methods that align with a theoretical or conceptual framework and help the project team answer their questions; and include dissemination that allows the research team to share broadly the research findings and implications of the findings for libraries and archives. Proposals for research grants may apply to any of the Project Types listed below: Pre-professional, Masters-level and Doctoral-level Programs, Early Career Development, and Continuing Education.

Project Categories

The project categories are:

- Community Anchors
- National Digital Platform
- Curating Collections

Below is detailed information about what is required in each project category area.

Community Anchors: We are interested in projects that investigate and build the skills and knowledge of library professionals to support the role of libraries as community

anchors that facilitate lifelong learning; enhance civic and cultural engagement; and support economic vitality, through programming and services. Training, research, and educational opportunities may focus on:

- Assessing opportunities for developing new community-based programs, relationships, promising products, or services that support and engage their communities.
- Designing educational opportunities informed by other sectors and disciplines that support library professionals' mastery of new skills to improve their ability to address community needs. These skills may include: project management, partnership development, design thinking, data analytics, impact assessment, participatory programming, leadership development, and iterative product development or systems analysis.
- Investigating widespread community challenges that both inform and are informed by current library and archival practice, feature mutually beneficial relationships between researchers and practitioners, occur between practitioners and their communities, and communicate findings in ways that have the potential to improve library services.

National Digital Platform: We are interested in projects that will increase library professionals' capacity to create, develop, and use the open source software applications used by libraries and archives to provide digital content and services to all users in the United States. Training, research, and educational opportunities may focus on:

- Planning new training programs for librarians or library students related to the development, implementation, or use of digital library tools.
- Supporting formal or informal educational programs to increase librarians' capacity related to the development, implementation, or use of digital library tools including but not limited to research and public access contexts. These projects should demonstrate that they build on existing work, are grounded in the needs of a wide range of libraries and archives, and that they involve a range of partners.
- Assessing the needs for and impact of investments in education and training for open source digital library tools. For example, proposed projects may examine librarians' education and training needs for coding or other skills, or employers' desired competencies for digital library staff.

Curating Collections: We are interested in projects that will increase librarians' and library professionals' capacity to create, preserve, manage, and provide access to digital library collections across the country. Training, research, and educational opportunities may focus on:

- Supporting efforts to establish plans for training library school students or library staff on topics related to preservation, conservation, and access. In particular,

training should address the stewardship of digital collections and, as appropriate, the synergy with physical collections.
- Identifying an emerging area of importance for librarian skill development as related to stewardship of digital collections, and bringing together stakeholders from both inside and outside the library sector to explore the topic. These projects should initiate new partnerships to increase the capacity of librarians to meet workforce needs
- Supporting formal or informal educational programs to increase librarians' capacity related to the stewardship of digital collections. These projects should clearly demonstrate that they build on existing work, are grounded in the needs of a wide range of libraries and archives, and that they involve a range of partners.
- Assessing the gaps in, needs for, and impact of investments in education and training products, services, and networks to support stewardship of digital collections across a range of institutions.

Project Types

Your application must designate one of the following four project types on the Program Information Sheet. The same proposal may not be submitted to IMLS under more than one project type.

- Pre-Professional
- Masters-level and Doctoral-level Programs
- Early Career Development
- Continuing Education

Note: If your application has a recruitment component, you should address ways to bring to the profession skills required to enhance library and/or archives services and broaden participation in the library profession, including members of diverse groups and communities.

Pre-Professional: Recruit future professionals to develop a diverse workforce in library and information science. In particular, attract promising high school or undergraduate students to consider careers in library and information science through statewide, regional, or national recruitment and part-time employment projects that are educational, cost effective, and have measurable outcomes.

Masters-level and Doctoral-level Programs:

Master's Programs: educate the next generation of librarians and archivists in nationally accredited graduate library programs to meet the evolving needs of the profession and society.

Doctoral Programs: Develop faculty to educate the next generation of library and archives professionals. In particular, increase the number of students enrolled in doctoral programs that will prepare faculty to teach master's students who will work in school, public, academic, research, and special libraries and archives. These programs also develop the next generation of library and archives leaders to assume positions as managers and administrators.

Early Career Development: Support the early career development of new faculty members in library and information science by supporting innovative research by untenured, tenure-track faculty. Proposed research should be in the faculty member's own field of inquiry and does not need to address library education or librarianship. Early Career Development projects must be submitted as a Research Grant.

Continuing Education: Improve the knowledge, skills, and abilities of library and archives staff through programs of continuing education, both formal and informal, including post-master's programs, residencies, internships, enhanced work experiences, blended learning opportunities, online learning modules, and other training programs for professional staff.

Proposal and Review Process

To better familiarize yourself with the process, we are including a chart that documents the entire program cycle. Your participation in the process begins where highlighted.

Sept. 1, 2016	✔	Applicants submit their preliminary proposals.
Sept. 2016	✔	IMLS checks the preliminary proposals for eligibility and completeness.
Sept. 2016	✔	IMLS identifies available preliminary proposal reviewers with appropriate expertise and assigns reviewers to evaluate each proposal.
Sept.–Oct. 2016	*ongoing*	Preliminary proposal reviewers receive access to the proposals, evaluate them, and complete their reviews and scores.
Oct.–Nov. 2016		Preliminary proposal review panels convene at IMLS in Washington, DC, for reviewers to discuss scores and merits of the proposals.
Dec. 2016		Based on the preliminary proposal review panel feedback, IMLS invites select applicants to submit full proposals.
Jan. 13, 2017		Applicants submit their full proposals.

Jan. 2017		IMLS checks the full proposals for eligibility and completeness.
Jan. 2017		IMLS identifies available full proposal reviewers with appropriate expertise and assigns reviewers to evaluate each proposal.
Jan.–Feb. 2017		Full proposal reviewers receive access to the proposals, evaluate them, and complete their reviews and scores.
Feb. 2017		IMLS staff members may hold phone calls to discuss scores and rankings with reviewers.
Feb. 2017		IMLS staff members review the financial information for each potential grantee.
March 2017		IMLS staff members recommend proposals for funding to the IMLS Director, who has the authority to make final funding decisions.
April 2017		IMLS makes awards. Whether or not they have received an award, all applicants receive anonymous copies of the panel reviews. IMLS also sends notification of the awards to each participating reviewer.

What to Expect at the Panel

When the panel meets at IMLS in Washington, DC, we will discuss each proposal. While our time is limited, we should be able to go over every proposal in sufficient detail. IMLS will provide laptops with access to the complete proposals as well as the reviews you submitted.

We do not need to reach consensus on any proposal, but you will have the opportunity to adjust your scores and add to or revise your comments after each proposal is discussed.

During the meeting, we will set aside time to hear your ideas and feedback about the review process and the grant program.

How Your Reviews Are Used

Your scores inform the ranking of proposals and are the basis for decisions about which proposals receive funding. Your work helps the Director and IMLS staff understand the strengths and weaknesses of each proposal. As such, it important that your scores support your comments and that your comments justify your scores. Your comments also help unsuccessful applicants revise their proposals for future grant cycles.

General Review Information

Verify access to proposals online

We will use Dropbox, an online file sharing system, to deliver proposals and supporting materials. (You do not need a Dropbox account to access the materials.) You will be emailed a link to a Dropbox folder. Please alert IMLS staff immediately if any proposals are missing or you cannot open them, or if you encounter any other issues.

Conflict of interest

Once you begin reviewing your assigned proposals, **contact us immediately if you identify any potential conflicts.** Please see the Reviewer Conflict of Interest Statement included as Appendix I of this handbook. A conflict of interest would arise if you have a financial interest in whether or not the proposal is funded, or if for some reason, you feel that you cannot review it objectively.

Required paperwork

You will receive a Conflict of Interest Statement and Certification. **Please complete this form and return it to your IMLS contacts no later than Wednesday, October 26, 2016.**

Time required

We estimate that it takes 20 to 30 minutes to evaluate one preliminary proposal. If you are a first time reviewer you may need more time.

Confidentiality

The information contained in grant proposals is strictly confidential. Do not discuss or reveal names, institutions, project activities, or any other information contained in the proposals. Contact IMLS if you have any questions concerning a proposal. **Do not contact applicants directly.**

Managing records

Keep your proposals and a copy of your reviews until we instruct you to destroy them, in case there are questions from IMLS staff. We will contact you after the review and award process has concluded instructing you to destroy your records. Please maintain confidentiality of all proposals that you review.

Review Process

Reading proposals

Your thorough reading and understanding of each proposal will be the key to providing both insightful comments and an overall rating for the proposal, ensuring that your comments are a reflection of your overall score. Before you review proposals, please read the LB21 NOFO.

Review criteria

Please provide summary evaluative comments for each of the three review areas. Below are the review areas as well as some example criteria you should consider for each area:

How well does the project address the goals of the National Leadership Grants Program and funding priorities of the agency?	**Questions to consider may include:** • Does the project provide a sound basis and means for measuring impact? • Does the project support IMLS digital stewardship policy? • Does the project have the potential for impact upon library and archival services and practices? • Does the project directly and practically address one of the two agency priorities, if applicable? See below for additional information.
Are the appropriate components in place to ensure successful implementation of the proposed project?	**Questions to consider may include:** • Does the project require partners, and have appropriate partners been contacted? • Is the staffing and expertise appropriate for the proposed project? • Are appropriate project management skills demonstrated? • Is the project cost-effective and easily replicable by other institutions? • Do the amount requested, budget breakdown, and timeline proposed seem appropriate for the project?
How could this proposal be strengthened or improved?	**Questions to consider may include:** • Are there other experts that should be included in the project? • Is there related work or research that should be considered? • Are there changes that could make the project more replicable or create a greater impact?

Writing comments

Draft comments for each of the required prompts. **We strongly recommend that you draft your comments using word processing software, and paste the comments into the review spreadsheet**.
- Use your professional knowledge and experience to assess the information objectively.
- If you question the accuracy of any information, call IMLS to discuss it. **Do not question the applicant's honesty or integrity in your written comments.**
- Do not contact the applicant directly.
- **Analyze** the proposal in your comments; summarizing or paraphrasing the applicant's own words will not help the applicant.

Should I consider...	Yes	No
an institution's financial or staffing needs?		X
the size or age of the organization?		X
my prior knowledge of an institution or project staff?		X
whether the organization has the appropriate resources to complete the project?	✔	
whether the applicant has included the information necessary for an adequate evaluation of its merits?	✔	
whether a project is new or a resubmission?		X
the proposed cost share? *(IMLS will confirm whether the proposed cost share meets the program requirements.)*		X
an institution's indirect cost rate?		X

Characteristics of constructive and effective comments:
- Presented in a constructive manner
- Concise, specific, easy to read and understand
- Specific to the individual applicant
- Reflect the professionalism of the reviewer
- Correlate with the rating that is given
- Acknowledge the resources of the institution
- Reflect the proposal's strengths and identify areas for improvement

Characteristics of poor comments:
- Make derogatory remarks (Offer suggestions for improvement rather than harsh criticism.)
- Penalize an applicant because you feel the institution does not need the money (An eligible institution may receive funds, regardless of institutional need.)

- Penalize an applicant because of missing materials (If you believe a proposal is missing required materials, please contact an IMLS staff member immediately.)
- Question an applicant's honesty or integrity (You may question the accuracy of information provided by the applicant, but if you are unsure how to frame your question, contact IMLS.)
- Offer or ask for irrelevant or extraneous information (Your comments should concern only the information IMLS requests of applicants.)
- Offer limited explanation or detail for the score provided

Remember that both successful and unsuccessful applicants use your comments to help improve their projects or future proposals.

Assigning scores

After you have read, evaluated, and written comments for each proposal, please provide a single numeric score from 1-5 (5 being the highest) that reflects your opinion of the proposal's overall quality and your recommendation of whether it should be funded this year. A score of 3 or above is typically considered "fundable."

Invite-able	**Excellent**	5	The preliminary proposal exemplifies all of the characteristics of a successful project. You believe it is well positioned to have a **broad impact**, it addresses an issue that has the potential to **advance library practice**, and it involves the right **collaborations**. <u>You recommend inviting a full proposal for this project without reservation</u>.
	Very Good	4	The preliminary proposal demonstrates most of the characteristics of a successful project, but with some minor improvements needed in developing the full proposal. You believe it has the potential to have a **broad impact**, it addresses an issue that has the potential to **advance library practice**, and it involves the right **collaboration.** <u>You recommend inviting the full proposal.</u>
	Good	3	The preliminary proposal demonstrates some of the characteristics of a successful project, but would require some major improvements in developing the full proposal. With these changes, you believe it has the potential to have a **broad impact**, it addresses an issue that has potential to **advance library practice**, and it involves the right **collaboration.** <u>You recommend inviting the full proposal, but acknowledge it may not be competitive without significant changes</u>. You think the proposal and/or the project could be easily strengthened for resubmission in a future grant cycle.

Do not Invite	**Some Merit**	2	The preliminary proposal does not demonstrate the characteristics of a successful project. While it may be a worthwhile project, it is flawed in one or more ways and would require major rethinking in order to be competitive for this particular grant program. <u>You do not think the proposal should be invited for funding in its current form, but that it demonstrates potential to be competitive in a future grant cycle.</u>
	Inadequate	1	The proposal is inadequate or is not well aligned with the goals of this particular grant program. It would not be possible to revise the project to meet all of the criteria for a successful project. <u>You do not recommend the proposal for funding or for resubmission.</u>

To help applicants understand and benefit from your reviews, make sure that your scores accurately reflect your written comments.

Submitting reviews

Review your draft comments and scores. Adjust your scores, if necessary, to more accurately reflect your written evaluation. **Scores should support comments, and comments should justify scores.**

Once you have completed your scores and comments for each proposal, we recommend that you keep a digital copy of your completed reviews until told to destroy it by IMLS.

Please send the review spreadsheet to your assigned Program Officer and Program Specialist via email. **The deadline to submit reviews is Wednesday, October 26 at 11:59PM Eastern.**

For all questions about reviewing, either technical or programmatic, contact IMLS staff.

Appendix I: Reviewer Conflict of Interest Statement

As a reviewer or panelist for the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), you may receive for review a grant proposal that could present a conflict of interest. Such a conflict could arise if you are involved with the applicant institution, or in the project described in the proposal, as a paid consultant or through other financial involvement. The same restrictions apply if your spouse or minor child is involved with the applicant institution or if the proposal is presented on behalf of an institution with which you, your spouse, or minor child is negotiating for future employment.

A present financial interest is not the only basis for conflict of interest. Through prior association as an employee or officer, you may have gained knowledge of the applicant that would preclude objective review of its proposal. Past employment (generally more than five years) does not by itself disqualify a reviewer so long as the circumstances of your association permit you to perform an objective review of the proposal. If you believe you may have a conflict of interest with any proposal assigned to you for review, please notify us immediately.

You may still serve as a reviewer even if your institution is an applicant in this grant cycle or you were involved in a proposal submitted in this grant cycle, as long as you do not review any proposal submitted by your own institution or any proposal in which you were involved. However, if you believe that these or any other existing circumstances may compromise your objectivity as a reviewer, please notify us immediately.

If a proposal presents no conflict of interest at the time you review it, a conflict of interest may still develop later on. Once you have reviewed a proposal, you should never represent the applicant in dealings with IMLS or another Federal agency concerning the proposal, or any grant that may result from it.

It is not appropriate, for your purposes or for the purposes of the institutions or organizations you represent, for you to make specific use of confidential information derived from individual proposals that you read while you were serving as an IMLS reviewer. In addition, pending proposals are confidential. Accordingly, you must obtain approval from IMLS before sharing any proposal information with anyone, whether for the purpose of obtaining expert advice on technical aspects of a proposal or for any reason.

If you have any questions regarding conflict of interest, either in relation to a specific proposal or in general, please contact IMLS immediately.